

someplace and ~~see~~ something I had always wanted to see. Since it appeared that those mythic purveyors of artistic inspiration and glory, the Muses, had finally chosen to smile down upon me from their Olympian ~~sanctuary~~, it seemed only fitting that I should choose Greece as my destination. So I called my two closest friends, Kira Cane and Corbin Bishop, and made arrangements that very night to leave the following day.

Greece was everything we had imagined it would be. I got so caught up in the ancient temples and exotic ~~sanctuaries~~ that I neglected to keep the one promise I had made myself before leaving; that I would compose at least one sketch (later to be finalized as a full-fledged painting) on the trip. So instead of visiting the Oracle at Delphi, I decided we would travel to the Pindus Mountain range, where, free from the stress of more tourist-ridden zones, I would compose my sketch in relative peace.

At a small family-run hotel at the foot of the Pindus Mountains, I began to compose that accursed sketch. Kira, Corbin, and I had taken our lunch out onto the balcony of our rented room, from where we were afforded a fine view of the wide-stretching Pindus range. A scarred and imposing mountain, that which was closest to the inn, dominated the horizon. As far as I had been able to ascertain, the locals avoided the mountain, claiming that it was haunted, inhabited by spirits, or something of the like. Our innkeeper, a friendly enough woman, was only moderately proficient in the English language, but I managed to extract the common name of the mountain, *The House of the Nine Sisters*, or more properly *Helicon*, from her.

The name intrigued me. Yet the mountain itself did not. Nevertheless, I decided would attempt to extract the hidden essence from that rather bland mountain as a sort of ultimate test of my skills, and display it on my canvas.

Why did I become a painter? When people ask me this question I tend to tell them what they want to hear. I claim painting is a beneficial form of psycho-therapy, a way to keep myself sane. When I paint I exorcise the terrible demons from my mind,

or some other more or less standard line. After all, I was trying to build my image as an artist, because, like it or not, image sells more paintings than artistic skill ever will. Whether this is right or wrong is beside the point. Most people who buy art don't understand art. Therefore, if a painter wants to sell a lot of paintings he has to conform to the image which will attract the kind of attention he is looking for. Or at least that is what I tell myself to justify my actions.

How did I really come to be a painter? For a short period of time I took high doses of nootropics, popularly known by the catch-phrase *smart drugs*, in the hopes these drugs would give me some insight as to how I might get ahead in this unforgiving world. Specifically, I experimented with a synergistic mixture of piracetam and hydraline. Besides some odd visual effects, improved intuition, and a tendency to categorize everything in the world within a metaphysical system of patterns, the nootropics had one overt effect. They made me draw pictures. These pictures were so impressively strange that I decided they had to be painted, and five years later other people call me a painter. The funny thing is, when people call me a painter, I know they're missing the point. My so-called paintings are little more than colored-in symbols. What I really am is a *symbolist*.

I firmly believe that the nootropics made me more subconsciously sensitive. I guess that's the best way to put it. Sometimes, after I painted particularly profound images, I would see those same images later that day, or later that week, in the clouds. I don't mean that I would see an unusual cloud formation and imagine that it appeared similar to what I had painted. I mean that clouds actually became those images, remaining so until I forced myself to look away.

At fairly regular intervals, I would be overcome by specific physical symptoms. These symptoms included lightheadedness, a slight expansion of mind, and an enhanced range of visual acuity. In more general terms, I would feel like I was just at the verge of falling into a deep trance. But I always managed to just keep my mental balance